Course Description:
This course will examine the foundations of today’s Japan that were established during the U.S. occupation, with its early left-leaning idealism and subsequent shift to conservatism. The class will examine what life was like for Japanese in the early post-war years, the nature of the U.S. occupation, the relationship between Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito, the creation of Japan’s constitution and other issues that still affect Japan today. We will use as a textbook the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, “Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II,” which is a solid work of scholarship that is also highly readable and even entertaining in the drama of its story.

Textbooks:

Reference Books:

Course Plan:
1. Overview of course.
5. The occupiers: Gen. Douglas MacArthur and the new American rulers. Competing analyses of Japan and the Japanese among the Americans. Reading: textbook chapter 6, “Neocolonial Revolution.” (We will cover all chapters in the textbook but some of them will be out of order.)
7. The role of Emperor Hirohito in the early post-war period and MacArthur’s use of him to achieve American goals. Reading: textbook chapter 9, “Imperial Democracy: Driving the Wedge.”
11. The Tokyo war-crimes trial. Japanese efforts to come to terms with the war. Reading: textbook chapters 15 and 16, “Victor’s Justice, Loser’s Justice” and “What Do You Tell the Dead When You Lose?”
13. Media, literature and language as Japan adjusts to post-war change. Reading: chapter 5, “Bridges of Language.”